
Transfer of Credits Performance Audit

Executive Summary June 2005

The Legislative Audit Division of the Montana Legislature issued a performance audit of Transfer of Credits practices in the Montana University System (MUS) in December 2004. The audit itself was conducted during the spring and summer months of 2004, when four members of the Legislative Audit staff visited almost all of the campuses to review transfer student files and to examine institutional practices that affect transfer students.

The performance audit contained the following statement as a summary of its conclusions:

When a new MUS governance structure was implemented in July 1994, student expectations and perceptions also began to change. Students perceived they were enrolled in a coordinated and consistent statewide delivery system for higher education. Our audit work found this perception does not reflect current practice . . . We found the transfer of credit process has not been standardized to reflect a system-wide perspective.

The audit included six (6) recommendations that, from the Legislative Audit Division's perspective, could create a more systematic approach to transfer practices in the Montana University System. One of the recommendations contained three (3) parts, so in fact, eight (8) individual recommendations were included in the Transfer of Credits Performance Audit. The Montana Board of Regents accepted those recommendations, and adopted several system-wide policies at the March 2005 and May 2005 meetings as its response to the recommendations.

A summary of the recommendations and the newly-enacted Regents' policies is set out on the following pages.

Audit Recommendation 1:

We recommend the Board of Regents implement a system of controls to promote standards for student transfers throughout MUS which include: A. Establishing time guidelines for completing transfer of credit evaluations; and B. Clearly documenting credit transfer decisions in a centralized location.

The Board of Regents adopted a policy, entitled System of Controls, that establishes deadlines for evaluation of transfer credits, documentation of those evaluation decisions, identification of the evaluators, and centralization of all records concerning evaluation of transfer student coursework.

Audit Recommendation 2:

We recommend the Board of Regents: A. Periodically collect transfer data to assess system-wide policy compliance; and B. Utilize reported data to make informed decisions.

A work group, composed primarily of institutional research personnel from several campuses, spent the summer 2005 months developing a monitoring and assessment plan for the new Board of Regents' transfer policies. That plan was approved by the Board of Regents in September 2005.

Audit Recommendation 3:

We recommend the Board of Regents clarify and enforce the MUS general education core policy.

The Board of Regents adopted a policy that sets out three (3) distinct avenues that transfer students can use to satisfy the lower division general education requirements on all of the campuses. Those three options are: completion of all of the 100 and 200-level coursework in a campus-specific general education program; completion of the MUS general education core, if the transfer student has successfully earned more than 20 credits in that core at the time of his/her transfer; or completion of an Associate of Arts or Associate of Science degree.

Audit Recommendation 4:

We recommend the Board of Regents develop transfer of credits policies to coordinate two-year transfer activities, specifically in relation to transfer courses from an Associate of Applied Science degree.

The Board of Regents adopted a policy that clarifies the difference between Associate of Arts, Associate of Science and Associate of Applied Science degrees. That policy also sets out the parameters of those two-year degrees, including number of credits and general education coursework. The policy also creates a new Certificate of Applied Science for the System. The Two-Year Education Council has been asked to assist with implementation of the new policy by "standardizing" existing two-year degree programs in the computer, business and healthcare areas.

Audit Recommendation 5:

We recommend the Board of Regents develop policy addressing criteria for outdated coursework.

The Board of Regents adopted a policy guaranteeing that coursework completed in the last five (5) years will be reviewed for possible use in a student's specific program of study; and coursework completed in the last fifteen (15) years will be reviewed for possible use in a student's general education program or as elective coursework. Individual programs can adopt stricter standards than the guarantee periods, but all programs of a similar nature must agree to that stricter standard before it can be enforced. Campuses are also free to review and possibly accept coursework outside the guarantee period.

Audit Recommendation 6:

We recommend the Board of Regents develop policy addressing transfer of cumulative GPA.

After significant review and discussion of this recommendation, the Board of Regents decided NOT TO ADOPT a policy that establishes an overall grade point average for students in the Montana University System. The overall grade point average would have included all classes attempted by students, regardless of where they took the classes. At the present time, the grade point average that appears on a student's official transcript is based on the courses he/she has attempted at the current institution.

Audit Recommendation 7:

We recommend the Board of Regents develop policy addressing minimum course grades.

The Board of Regents adopted a policy requiring students to earn a C- or better in program of study courses; C- or better in general education courses; and D- or better in elective courses. Individual programs can establish stricter expectations. The Board also decided that all campuses will adopt a grading system that includes the use of plus/minus grading.

Audit Recommendation 8:

We recommend the Board of Regents develop a transfer policy for LPN programs that at minimum standardizes: A. Number of credits required; B. Type of degree awarded; and C. Program transfer agreements.

The Board of Regents adopted a model for all Licensed Practical Nursing programs that sets the credit total at 50; specifies that the degree will be a certificate; and establishes a common set of pre-nursing and LPN nursing courses, including title and credit amount. The model also establishes a common set of nursing courses for those Registered Nursing programs in the System that also offer an LPN certificate.

Most of the new Board of Regents' policies dealing with transfer practices can be found in the Board's Policies and Procedures Manual, under Section 300 dealing with Academic Affairs. The electronic address for that section is:
<http://www.montana.edu/wochelp/borpol/bor300/bor300.html>.

The LPN model curriculum can be found at: <http://mus.montana.edu/asa/Nursing.htm>.
